

Way We Were

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A look back 100 years ago

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We bid 2017 goodbye on Sunday night. What can we say but, “what a year”? As is tradition for this column at year’s end, let’s take a look back at “the way we were” here in Park City 100 years ago, in 1917.

1917 was a tumultuous year for the United States and the rest of the world. As World War I raged overseas, 1917 saw the first woman sworn into the US House of Representatives, a devastating mine fire in Butte, Montana that killed 168, widespread labor and race riots, and the continued fight for women’s suffrage.

Park City faced a measles outbreak in January of that year, with twenty-one houses quarantined and a delayed resumption to school after the winter holidays. As February dawned, measles cleared and the town was busy establishing a night school to teach English and prepare immigrants for citizenship exams. March saw heavy snowstorms and subsequent avalanches and train accidents.

It was also in March that an telegram between Germany and Mexico intercepted by the United States was made public. In the note, Germany promised to interfere in the Border Wars and return the American Southwest to Mexico should Mexico declare war on the US. It was one of the final incidents to precipitate the US’s entry into World War I. By late March, flags were raised over nearly every building and Parkites became hyper-vigilant to the possibility of pro-German sympathies around town.

The US officially declared war on Germany on April 6, 1917. Though President Wilson had hoped to raise a volunteer force of one million soldiers, by May it was obvious that relying solely on volunteers wouldn’t suffice. The Selective Service bill was quickly pushed through Congress. June 5 was the first of three registration days on which all men between ages 21 and 30 were required to register for the draft.

Park City held a joint celebration of Miner’s Union Day and Flag Day on June 14. Because of the war, the event was excessively patriotic, with parades, baseball games, and concerts. The festivities were so grand that the annual Labor Day celebration that September, long considered one of the biggest parties of the year, went largely unobserved.

Much of the rest of the year was dominated by news of the War. Three contingents of Summit County boys left for service and the newspaper often published their letters home. Parkites donated a collective \$11,000 to the Red Cross and \$300,000 of Liberty Loan subscriptions. They planted victory gardens and advocated for reduced consumption of goods. They worried about their soldier boys, attended patriotic lectures and rallies, and argued with

neighbors over “un-American” sentiments. Mostly, though, they worked hard to carry on with their lives. That December a popular motivational and advertising slogan was posted in many Main Street store windows: “Christmas as usual.”

The *Record* wished its readers “the best of health” and “abundant prosperity” as 1917 drew to a close. The Park City Museum wishes all of you the same.



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Credit: Park City Historical Society and Museum, Himes-Buck Digital Collection

Caption: The Flag Day celebration on June 14, 1917 also saw the unveiling of a 15x30-foot flag flown from a brand-new 100-foot pole crowned with electric lights, pictured.